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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE POSTCOLONIAL ARCHIVE: FICTION AS A TOOL OF HISTORICAL RECOVERY IN YAA GYASI'S HOMEGOING

Deepak H. Shinde

1. Assistant Professor, Department of English, Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women University, Jnanashakti Campus, Toravi, Vijayapura- 586 108.

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Abstract

The present article examines Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (2016) from a postcolonial perspective that acts as a literary archive to recover the silenced history of Africa and African diaspora. With the multigenerational narrative, the novel traces the divergent lives of two half sisters and their descendants, one lineage in Ghana and the other one in America. *Homegoing* re-establishes the fragments of erased histories in the colonial or transatlantic era. The paper also argues that Gyasi's novel inherits the Postcolonial archive oral histories, cultural memory, and personal narratives into the broader story of colonial and diasporic trauma. Drawing on postcolonial theory, this study analyzes how *Homegoing* offers a place for recovering identity and healing while also reclaiming ancestral voices and destabilizing colonial history. The paper also sheds light on how, Gyasi's work demonstrates the unique ability of the fiction to serve as a de-colonial archive, making visible invisible and restoring agency to histories once silenced.

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Introduction:-

The notion of the archive in postcolonial studies is closely related to power, knowledge, and memory. Colonial archive like the official documents, histories and the narratives were presented by the imperial regimes in order to control both the lands and information about colonized people and concealed it by silencing indigenous voices and legitimizing colonial domination. Gayatri Spivak emphasizes in her concept of the "epistemic violence" the colonial discourse have marginalized and erased subaltern perspective (Spivak, 1988). Thus the process of recovering, reconstructing marginalized histories turns into an act of resistance and decolonization. Similarly, the Ghanaian descendants wrestle with the legacies of British colonialism, tribal conflicts, and post-independence challenges. This is evidently reflects through the characters like, Quey and Akua as they confront the cultural hybridization and trauma brought by colonialism. The present text recovers history that official archives ignores and does not amplify the visibility of their struggles and resilience. These suppressed histories are further individualized and revitalized into new life by using first person narration to its characters. Gyasi emphasizes memory transmission as a means of cultural survival through their dedication to layered story telling echoes oral traditions. The novel recounts the story of two African sisters, Effia and Esi, who are separated at birth. Effia, known as "the beauty," is sent as a concubine to a British slave trader at a slave castle, where as many Africans are kept in dungeons below for weeks, prior to

being shipped and enslaved in the West. While at the castle, Effia hears screams from the dungeons below but, after inquiring, she is told there is simply "cargo" there. Effia does not know that down there in a dungeon, soon to endure the Middle Passage, is her sister Esi, whom she has never met. The entire novel follows the lineage of the descendants of Effia and the descendants of Esi over the span of six generations, going back and forth between the two families, in a series of chapters. The story hops from character to character through varying times, different geographic areas, and from Ghana to the U.S., through to the present day. The epic story encapsulates over 250 years of change in the African diaspora, starting with present-day Ghana, covering tribal rivalries and colonial involvement.

Yaa Gyasi received widespread critical acclaim for her work as a post-colonial writer whose debut novel, *Homegoing*, critically examines the enduring legacies of colonialism and slavery on African and African diaspora communities. Scholars and critics have lauded her for her meticulous storytelling and profound exploration of how colonial histories undermine kinship networks, erode cultural identities, and perpetuate systemic inequalities across generations. Gyasi's ability to reclaim marginalized African voices and histories has been particularly praised for contributing meaningfully to post-colonial discourse, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and deconstructing colonial power structures. Her work has been recognized as a powerful act of resistance that promotes awareness, healing, and decolonization. This critical acclaim affirms her place as a pivotal voice in contemporary post-colonial literature, highlighting her influence in reshaping narratives about Africa's history, identity, and ongoing struggles with colonial legacies.

Homegoing systematically destabilizes the colonial historiography. It not only retrieves forgotten histories but also critiques the colonial historiographical approaches that led to their erasure. Colonial records often provide a Eurocentric, clean, or pragmatic portrayal of African and its inhabitants, bolstering imperialist ideologies while minimizing violence and exploitation. These archives depicted African bodies as commodities or colonial subject, categorizing them as cultural "others" stripped of nuance. The novel actively challenges these narratives by portraying the brutal realities of the slave trade and colonialism from African and diasporic perspective. The depiction of Cape Coast Castle, both physical site and a symbolic element, is pivotal. The castle, historically a significant centre for the transatlantic slave trade, is shown as a place of immense suffering and trauma, with the dungeons underneath starkly contrasting colonial governor's experience residence above. This spatial symbolism highlights how colonial histories often suppressed or concealed the violence that enabled their existence. As it is evident in excerpt from the novel;

After that first day in the Castle, James never spoke to Effia about the slaves they kept in the dungeon, but he spoke to her often about beasts. That was what the Asantes trafficked most here. Beasts, monkeys and chimpanzees, even a few leopards. Birds like the king crowns and parrots that she and Fiifi used to try to catch when they were children, roaming the forests in search of the one odd bird, the bird that had feathers so beautiful it seemed to be set apart from the rest. They would spend hours on end looking for just one such bird, and most days they would find none. (31)

The above passage vividly states that, for European slaver or a colonial master. Humans and non-humans and space are their slaves, a commodity to be utilized. And they also try to conceal their brutalities by controlling its narration. Additionally, the novel highlights that the effects of colonialism endure even after official decolonization. Esi's descendants (who were deported to America as slaves) with systematic racism and mass incarceration demonstrate how mechanism racial and economic exploitation are continuation of colonial oppression. This ongoing narrative challenges that treat colonial as a singular historical event instead of an extended process. By intertwining African and American histories, *Homegoing* also contests nationalist or regionally confined historical perspective. It illustrates the transatlantic dimension of colonial violence and its repercussion on the identity and memory, providing a more holistic view of understanding traditional historiographical boundaries.

Memory, Trauma, and Healing:

In *Homegoing*, memory plays a crucial role as tool for reclaiming history and identity. Postcolonial theorist and trauma studies scholars point out that memories of trauma caused by colonial encounter and slavery are frequently fractured, repressed or disputed (Caruth, 1996). These recollections may be processed, represented and conveyed through literature. Gyasi portray this in her novel; by use of recurring motifs like that represent trauma and its inter-generational transmission, such as fire, water and ghosts. The tale of Akua (descendant of Effia) who becomes a

“Crazy Women” and is tormented by the ghost of her past, exemplifies who trauma effects descendants. Her insanity symbolizes the psychological strain of past violence that spans generations. She narrates her dream in the novel;

In my dreams I kept seeing this castle, but I did not know why. One day, I came to these waters and I could feel the spirits of our ancestors calling to me. Some were free, and they spoke to me from the sand, but some others were trapped deep, deep, deep in the water so that I had to wade out to hear their voices. I waded out so far, the water almost took me down to meet those spirits that were trapped so deep in the sea that they would never be free. When they were living they had not known where they came from, and so dead, they did not know how to get to dry land. I put you in here so that if your spirit ever wandered, you would know where home was. (244) The memory of past haunts even through her dreams. Additionally, the novel’s cyclical structure concludes with the meeting of the descendants of Marjorie and Marcus in the present-day Ghana, implying the potential for reunion and healing. As a result, this text bridges the gap created by colonial violence. Homegoing acknowledges trauma and centers marginalized memories, offering pathways for identity reconstruction and cultural recovery.

Fiction as Decolonial Archive:

Gyasi’s Homegoing ultimately lauds for the unique ability of fiction to heal and recover the postcolonial history. While traditional archives are bounded by institutional, political and ideological constraints, fiction is fluid, imaginative, and capable of embodying complex, contradictory histories. Gyasi’s work also contends the binaries of history and fiction, suggesting that storytelling--- from the perspective of a marginalized section---is an essential form of knowledge production.

Conclusion:-

Yaa Gyasi’s Homegoing is a debut novel that follows the descendants of two half-sisters in 18th-century Ghana, Effia and Esi, who are separated at birth. The book traces their lineage through centuries of history, with one branch of the family experiencing life in a slave fort while married to an Englishman, and the other sold into slavery and sent to America. The story moves through both Ghanaian and American history, covering the slave trade, the Civil War, the Great Migration, and 20th-century Harlem.

Yaa Gyasi’s Homegoing exemplifies the power of postcolonial fiction as tool for historical recovery and the creation of alternative archives. By recreating silenced history across the continents and centuries. This literary text challenges the epistemic violence of colonial archives and reinstates the voice of those erased by empire or slavery. As postcolonial societies continue to grapple with legacies of colonial violence, literature serves as illuminating and vital archive-- one that not only protects historical memory but also transforms and empowers.

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